

Introduction

Your government's coronavirus task force promised to get the vaccine out with warp speed. Your lawmakers promised to provide relief for millions of suffering Americans. Your family and friends promised to visit you so you can open presents together, eat ham together, and bake Christmas cookies together. Your pastor promised to visit you in your homes, talk to you in the flesh, and know what's going on in your life. Your culture promised that the holiday season would be the most wonderful time of the year. How are all those promises doing? The vaccine will still take months to get out to the general public. Senators are still scrambling to put together economic relief before the Christmas break. Family and friends have had to cancel visits and settle for video calls. Your pastor is holed up behind a computer screen and a telephone to try to connect with his members. The most wonderful time of the year has turned into the strangest, saddest, sickest time of the year. Along the way, so many promises have been made, adjusted, modified, and broken during the unexpected twists and turns of this pandemic. Are God's promises this holiday season like COVID promises—always subject to revision, with the sinking feeling that it's going to eventually get cancelled? Today God's Word comforts us that nothing in all the world can get in the way of God fulfilling his promise to send a Savior for our lost, broken world. We specifically focus on the First Lesson from 2 Samuel 7, a foundational promise in the Bible, where God promises King David he would:

Build a Bigger, Better House!

As I look back on my life, my house changed a lot. As a little child, we moved three times in five years, and I innocently thought that every two years you just moved, that's what everyone in America did. Then once we lived in Wisconsin for six years, we moved to a different house across town for high school. Then I moved off to college in Minnesota, only to spend the summers in Colorado working at a church. Then I moved to Germany for a year. Then I moved to our seminary near Milwaukee, only to unload my boxes of books every August and May. Then I moved to Madison for vicar year before moving back to the seminary. Then I moved here to Ann Arbor, only to live in an apartment. Once we bought our condo two years later, almost thirty years into my life, I could finally set down roots and stop moving.

As David looked back on Israel's life, God's house changed a lot. The young tabernacle was nothing more than a tent sitting under the shadow of Mt. Sinai. Then whenever the Israelites marched from camp to camp through the wilderness, the tabernacle moved with them. Then once Joshua crossed the Jordan River and conquered the Promised Land, the tabernacle was set up in the town of Shiloh. Then once the Philistines invaded in the time of the judges, they stole the Ark of the Covenant and apparently destroyed the tabernacle. Then the Ark return to Israelite hands, first to the town of Beth Shemesh, then to Keriath Jearim, then finally to Jerusalem, where once again, it sat under a tent. Now King David, who's walking around his brand new palace, is wondering, "God needs to set down some roots! I have a big, nice house; why shouldn't God have a big, nice house? God, I want to build you a temple!"

David was so focused on the future, what he would do for God, when God is more focused on the past, what he did for David. God took this shepherd boy from Bethlehem and elevated him to the king's throne in Jerusalem. God was with him to bless him every day of his life. God defeated all of David's enemies as he expanded Israel's borders to their greatest extent

ever, finally fulfilling what was promised to Abraham and to Joshua long ago. Then God focuses on the future. ***Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed.*** Sound familiar? Long ago, God promised to Abraham that he would make this name great and give this land to his descendants (Ge 12:2-3). So many years later, God's promise to David falls right in line with his promise to Abraham; they both are part of God's gracious covenant with his people. Finally, after so many years of oppression, Israel would have roots, a place you can settle down, a place you don't have to fear will get invaded, a place to call home.

David wanted to build God a big, nice house; God promises to build David a bigger, better house. ***"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."***

Notice the artful play on words: David wanted to build God a house, a temple, but God wants to build David a house, a dynasty. David thought he was going to do something big for God; God was going to something bigger and better. God simply answers David, "No, you're not the one who will build me a temple, but yes, I will establish your kingly line forever."

So when was this fulfilled? It's not so simple. After David died, his son Adonijah threatened to steal the throne away from Solomon, but after that was settled, ***Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established*** (1 Ki 2:12). Under Solomon's Golden Age, everyone in Israel ***lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree*** (4:25). Once Solomon prepared to build the temple, he wrote to Hiram, King of Tyre, that he intended to building the temple for God, ***as the Lord told my father David, when he said, "Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name."*** (5:5). Finally at the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed, ***You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it.*** (8:24). Sure, Solomon reigned a long time and solidified his father's dynasty. Yet even after Solomon's forty-year reign, he died. And even after about 400 years of David's dynasty in Judah, the Babylonians came to conquer the capital, depose the king, and exile the people. What then? How could David's throne endure forever? Enter Gabriel, who promised to a young Jewish girl that her son would be the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior, who would sit on David's throne.

This is a classic example of what's called prophecy with intermediate fulfillment. While direct prophecy is fulfilled only in Christ, prophecy with intermediate fulfillment is partially fulfilled in a future person and then fully fulfilled in Christ. Think of it like a pit stop on a road trip. For example, my parents live in Wisconsin. You have to travel through Chicago to get to Wisconsin. Can I say, "I traveled to Chicago?" Sure. We traveled there and stopped to get gas, food, and take a break. But I don't travel to Chicago for the exclusive purpose of filling up my car with gas and grabbing a bite to eat. Chicago's not the ultimate destination. The ultimate destination is when I turn on Meadowbrook Lane to see family. In the same way, can we say, "Is this promise fulfilled in Solomon?" Sure. The promise has to get traced through him. But Solomon is like a pit stop for lunch and gas. As good as it is, it's not the ultimate destination. The place this prophetic road finally ends is in Christ, when Gabriel announced to Mary that her son Jesus would sit on David's throne.

Still today, it's easy for us to fall into the same trap as David: focusing on our plans for God. God, look at the big, nice house that we renovated for you three and a half years ago! God, look at all the extra services we have for you during the holiday season! God, look at how peaceful and easygoing our small congregation is compared to large, schismatic congregations! God looks at us and says, "All that is nice. But you're sadly missing the point. You're overlooking the true grandeur. I have something bigger and better in mind for you."

God promises to build us a bigger, better house – an eternal kingdom – through David's messianic descendant. To the bigger, better Son of David God would ultimately say, with the deepest significance of the words, "***I will be his father, and he will be my son.***" On Christmas Day, God's Son, begotten from all eternity, also became Mary's son. To the bigger, better Son of David God would ultimately say, with the deepest significance of the words, "***I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.***" On Good Friday, God's Son was punished with Pilate's flogging, not because he sinned, but because he took our sin on himself. To the bigger, better Son of David God would ultimately say, with the deepest significance of the words, "***Your house and your kingdom will endure forever.***" On Easter, God's Son proved that he could destroy this temple and rebuild it in three days, because Solomon's temple that manifested God's presence on earth was manifest once and for all in Jesus' body on earth (Jn 2:19). The living and reigning Christ would endure for all eternity. Jesus takes what Solomon did and makes it bigger and better.

The same unconditional covenant God promised to Abraham, David, and Solomon he promises to you. The king after David was a mixed bag of astounding wisdom and moral failures, yet God never took his love away from him. Like Solomon, it doesn't matter how much your life is a mixed bag of success and failure, because God's love for you is unconditional. The king after David provided Israel with peace, yet it quickly descended into a split kingdom. Like Solomon, it doesn't matter how tenuous earthly peace is, because God's peace for you will never pass away. The king after David protected Israel from all their oppressors, yet eventually the Assyrians and Babylonians came knocking at their door. Like Solomon, Jesus will protect you from the bigger, badder oppressors of sin, death, and the devil. If you thought Israel had it good under King Solomon, you have it bigger and better under King Jesus!

Conclusion

Watershed moments – everyone remembers where they were, what they were thinking, what happened next. They're inscribed in your memory for your whole life. For my parents' generation, it was the fall of the Berlin Wall. For my generation, it was 9/11. For this new generation, it probably will be the coronavirus. This prophecy to David is a watershed moment. Certain indelible events stand out throughout the history of God's unfolding revelation to his people. One commentator writes, "The Lord's words recorded here arguably play the single most significant role of any Scripture found in the Old Testament in shaping the Christian understanding of Jesus."¹ God's people ever since the Garden of Eden longed for a coming descendant from Eve's line who would crush the serpent's head. Now God's people ever since David longed for a coming descendant, *a coming King*, from David's line, who would sit on his throne for all eternity. Many years later, it all came full circle. A descendant of David, Joseph, traveled to the town of David, after Mary received the angel's promise that her child would inherit David's throne. In a humble, makeshift house on Christmas Eve, a bigger, better house was being built. Amen.

¹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 337.